

Scientists intrigued by rock that went bump on the roof

By MERVIN AUBESPIN
Courier-Journal Staff Writer

That loud boom heard in Louisville and surrounding areas Monday may have been caused by a visitor from outer space.

At least that's what some local scientists think.

Mrs. Marie Barlow heard the boom about 3:30 p.m. at her home at 4509 Greenwood Ave. in western Louisville. It was followed by another sound that seemed to come from the roof of the two-story house.

"The first noise sounded like thunder, and the second noise sounded like maybe some ice had fallen," she said yesterday.

When her husband, Robert, a school teacher, came home he noticed a hole, about three feet across, in the roof. And his investigation turned up a black rock about the size of a softball on the roof.

Yesterday the rock had local scientists scratching their heads.

According to Tom Boone, director of Rauch Planetarium, the noise that was heard as far away as West Point, Ky., and Georgetown, Ind., could have been caused by an exploding meteor or bolide. The rock could be a fragment of it — a rare find, since there are only about 2,000 known meteorites in the world.

"Bolides or exploding meteors are common, but to find a fragment like this — if it is a fragment — is extremely uncommon," Boone said.

"A meteor racing through the sky explodes when it meets the friction of the earth's atmosphere, and this may well be all that was left," Boone said after examining the rock yesterday.

Dr. Graham Hunt, of the University of Louisville Department of Geology, was more guarded. He said that sometime today he would cut a piece of the rock for a laboratory test that would give positive identification.

"You have to be very careful with

identification. That is why compared to the large numbers of rocks turned in for identification, a very small amount on a worldwide basis have been positively identified" as bolides, he said.

However, he added that if the rock is a meteor fragment, it would be quite a scientific find.

According to information from the Geological Survey of Canada, meteors are pieces of a comet or fragments of small planets called asteroids that have been shattered by collisions in space.

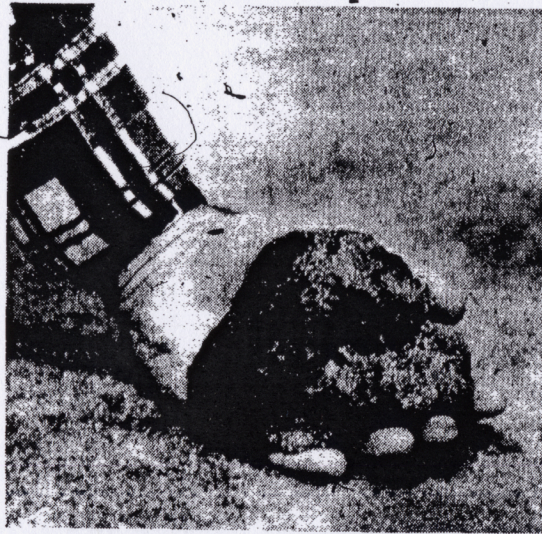
Fragments of meteors that reach earth are called meteorites and may vary in size from that of a pinhead to a mass weighing several tons.

Hunt said he intends to cut a small piece of the rock with a diamond saw, polish it and study it under a microscope.

"Under the microscope we will see if

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Staff Photo by Richard Bruck

This is the rock that crashed into the Barlows' roof.

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this rock has the unique characteristics that all meteorites have," he said.

He also said it would be helpful to know the exact path of the meteor — if that's what it was.

Boone said that he had received two reports from persons who said they saw a trail of white in the sky and heard the explosion.

He requested that any one else who saw the phenomenon call him at the planetarium. Such information would be helpful in plotting the path of the rock and identifying it, he added.

As of last night, a number of persons from Jefferson County, Bullitt County and Southern Indiana had told The Courier-Journal they saw the trail in the sky.

Yesterday, the Barlows expressed surprise at the excitement their rock had caused.

Barlow said that, after discovering the

Two people arrested in murder of woman

Louisville police yesterday arrested two persons in connection with the murder of Dolores Eddie at her home Monday.

Tommy Dozier, 33, no address available, was charged with murder, and Norma Jean Beasley, 38, of the 1000 block of Fisk Court, was charged with first-degree hindering apprehension. Both persons were arrested at 5 p.m. in the 1000 block of Fisk Court.

hole in the roof he crawled into the attic and found that the impact also had broken a two-by-four rafter and jarred plaster from the ceiling of a small upstairs room.

Yesterday afternoon, new sections of roofing material covered the hole.

"You know if it hadn't been for all this ice and snow, I would have gotten out my ladder and repaired that roof and probably just thrown that rock in the backyard," he said.

"You know, I had no idea what that rock was and had not the roofer talked so much about it we wouldn't have called you all (the news media)."

Barlow said that, although he has agreed to let scientists at U of L examine the rock, he would like to keep it. "You never can tell what I have here," he said.

Rule requiring testing of cattle is ruled legal

The Courier-Journal Bureau

FRANKFORT, Ky. — Franklin Circuit Judge Squire Williams yesterday denied a temporary injunction sought by 14 livestock markets to prevent enforcement of a state regulation that requires testing of cattle for brucellosis.

Williams ruled that the state Board of Agriculture is legally empowered to draft and enforce such regulations. The regulation requires testing before cattle can be marketed at the stockyards.

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U of L scientists say rock is probably a meteorite

By MERVIN AUBESPIN
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Experts at the University of Louisville said yesterday they are about "99 per cent sure" the rock that fell on a home in western Louisville Monday is a meteorite.

Although the scientists are still guarded about classifying the softball-size rock a meteorite, microscopic examination of its texture yesterday indicated that it is, according to a spokesman for the scientists.

"The overall picture looks good. The minerals were the same materials found on earth, but the texture . . . suggests that it was a meteorite," said Tom Boone, director of Rauch Planetarium at U of L.

He said a test made by Dr. Graham Hunt, of U of L's geology department, found that the rock weighs 2,314 pounds, or 1,051 grams.

Dr. Alan Johnson, professor of natural sciences at U of L's Speed Scientific School and considered a worldwide expert on meteors, also examined the rock and indicated he was almost certain it was a meteorite.

Johnson said a new meteorite would be quite an unusual find, since less than 2,000 confirmed meteorites exist.

Boone said only 21 meteorites have been found in Kentucky, with the last one having been discovered in the 1950s.

Boone said the noise that was heard Monday as far away as the Tennessee-Kentucky border and Georgetown, Ind.,

could have been caused by an exploding meteor. The rock could be a fragment of that meteor.

Boone said that he and other scientists yesterday visited Robert Barlow, at 4509 Greenwood Ave., to examine the roof where the rock landed and that following their visit Barlow donated the rock to U of L.

According to Mrs. Barlow, the meteorite apparently fell on the roof of the two-story house about 3:30 p.m. Monday shortly after she heard a loud "explosion-like noise."

According to Boone, meteors are pieces of a comet or fragments of small planets called asteroids that have been shattered by collisions in space. They are set ablaze by the tremendous friction that develops as they hurtle through the atmosphere toward earth.

He said fragments or pieces of meteors that reach earth are called meteorites and they vary in size from that of a pin head to a mass weighing several tons.

"Because meteorites are some of the only natural materials recovered from space, they are invaluable to scientists in their study of outer space and space vehicle re-entry problems," Boone said.

He also pointed out that meteorites provide important clues as to what the interior of the earth is like.

He said plans are to contact the Smithsonian Institution today for advice

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on testing the stone. He also said that Hunt will make other cuts in the stone for study and possible positive identification.

Besides studying the rock itself, Hunt and Boone are trying to trace its path. They are asking persons who may have seen a white trail in the sky and heard an explosion about 3:30 p.m. Monday to contact the planetarium.

He said that yesterday more than 100 calls had been received from persons who said they saw the phenomenon. One of the calls came from Franklin, Ky., near the Tennessee state line.

Boone said that traditionally meteorites are named for the town or county in which they are found, but he and some of his peers would like to suggest naming the meteorite after the Barlows — if it is a meteorite.

"They have been so nice. Donating it to the university and all . . . it would be a nice gesture," Boone said

